

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
ADVANTAGES
WHICH THIS COUNTRY DERIVES FROM
A FREE AND UNFETTERED IMPORTATION
OF THE
RAW MATERIAL OF COTTON WOOL;
AND

On the Danger of disturbing the present System by any Burthens or Prohibitions tending to check its Admission into the Country.

THE combination which is said to be forming by two great commercial bodies in this kingdom, for the purpose of checking the free importation of cotton wool, is of so alarming a nature as to excite the just and immediate jealousy, not only of the cotton spinners and manufacturers, but also of every true friend to the solid and real interest of the British Empire.

The object of the proposed combination is said to be for the purpose of confining the importation of cotton wool to the East India and Turkey Companies for the Asiatic growths; and to the West India merchants for the growth of the British islands.

It has generally been admitted as a maxim as sound as it is obvious in commercial policy, that, in a manufacturing country, the raw materials necessary to promote every branch of national industry should be as free as air, and admissible from every country in the world. And hence the wisdom of the British Government was manifested in the admission of cotton wool, duty free from all quarters; and this too at a period when the manufacture was of little importance.

Since the year 1773, when cotton mills first came to be in use, the importation of this raw material has increased from 2,559,829 pounds, producing about 880,000l. sterling in manufactured goods, to about 33,000,000,* equal to more than ~~seven~~^{eight} millions of pounds sterling, when wrought up into the various fabrics to which it is applied, so that after a proper allowance is made for all the raw materials used in the different branches of the cotton manufacture, by manufacturing the importation of this year, there would remain to the nation, for the labour of the people alone, a clear yearly profit of more than five millions sterling.

Next to the advantages derived from ingenious machinery, much of the prosperity which has attended the astonishing and rapid progress of this manufacture, has unquestionably proceeded, not only from the many channels

*COTTON imported and retained for consumption in Great Britain for the years hereafter mentioned

	Pounds.	Value in manufactured goods
Namely, 1773	2,559,829	£. 880,000 0 0
1783	9,546,179	3,000,000 0 0
1784	11,280,238	3,750,000 0 0
1785	17,992,888	6,000,000 0 0
1786	19,151,867	6,500,000 0 0
1787	22,638,944	7,000,000 0 0
1788	20,606,848	6,000,000 0 0
1789	32,000,000	8,000,000 0 0

channels which were opened for obtaining proper qualities of the raw material; but also from the circumstance of the foreign growths being best adapted to the fine fabrics of muslins, which have of late made so considerable a progress; and which is so exceedingly important in a national point of view, as to produce in many instances from 5 to 10,000 per cent. on the value of the raw material, *and this for labour alone.*

To check or to impede by any legislative restriction a manufacture of such importance to the country, could be considered in no other light than a species of national robbery, which is to be hoped will never be committed;—and yet the object of the application now said to be going forward, is tantamount of this: for it goes to the establishment of a system whereby foreign cotton shall not be admitted at all, or if admitted, to pay a discriminating duty sufficient to check its introduction*: Now let us examine for a moment what would be the consequence of such a measure.——

By limiting the importation of coarse cotton, an artificial scarcity would be created by speculations, and the value would unavoidably be enhanced to the cotton spinner. The manufactured goods would of consequence increase in price, and would thereby be prevented from supporting the competition, and becoming any object of commerce abroad: *and the fine cotton wool, so necessary to the most profitable branch of this manufacture, by being rendered less accessible would be still more an object of speculation, dangerous in the extreme, to its future success.*——

To elucidate the subject it may be proper to descend to some particulars relative to the aggregate importation of this raw material, and the various uses to which it is applied in the manufacture.——

Taking the last two years, and also the present year, on an average, the total quantity will be found to amount to about ^{Twenty-two} ~~twenty-three~~ millions of pounds.

Of this quantity the British Islands are supposed

to produce, about	- - - - -	3,800,000
The Turkey cotton imported directly, and	} about	4,700,000
circuitously, - - - - -		

The French and Spanish cotton, of American growths, 14,500,000lb

The Portuguese settlements, ditto - ditto 9,500,000

The Dutch settlements, ditto - ditto 4,800,000

The Isle of France and the East Indies, about, 1,400,000

Total pounds to be applied to the various purposes of	} 32,300,000
the manufacture, - - - - -	

Thus it would appear, that exclusive of the Smyrna cotton, nearly one half of all the cotton best adapted to the consumption of this country, is composed of foreign growths, imported partly from the continent of Europe, and in part circuitously through the medium of our islands in the West-Indies.

It is well known, that not an ounce of cotton imported from our own islands, or from Smyrna, by the Turkey Company, is applicable to any of the very *fine branches*, from whence the largest proportion of national profit is derived: and yet the object of the proposed application to government is, to cut down, root and branch, these resources, from whence the supplies for this advantageous branch of industry are drawn.

To the manufacturers, it would be a serious evil indeed, to be prevented from importing fine cotton from whatever quarter it can be found.

Perhaps it will be argued, that the quantity imported is more than equal to the consumption; and that a preference in the first instance, should be given to the growths of our own islands, and the importations of the

* Foreign Cotton imported from France, is already loaded with a duty of 12 per cent, which is not only a sufficient inducement to a circuitous transit by our own islands, but ought to be considered as a bounty sufficiently high in favour of the direct importations.

Turkey Company.—If these two bodies, the West-India Planters and Levant Merchants, could shew clearly, that by adopting their system, sufficient quantities of cotton, fit for all the purposes of the manufacture could be obtained in such abundance as to prove too unwieldy for the interference of speculators, or for any contingency calculated to raise the price above its true level, then there might be some grounds for argument upon the subject: but as this is morally impossible, and as there is every reason to expect, from the renovated state of the manufactures, that the whole extent of the importations, as now estimated, will soon be required, and perhaps more, why should the legislature interfere in the limiting or reducing the quantity? if it is really found, after the manufacture is once more restored to its former vigour, and all the cotton mills and Jennies in full work, that the quantity of cotton still cannot be wrought up, it will at last find its true level, and the importation of the surplus from foreign countries will soon be reduced and accommodated to the demand.

It is therefore earnestly to be wished, that before these respectable bodies, the Turkey Company, and the West-India Planters and Merchants solicit from government any check or prohibition, on any species of cotton used in the manufactures the matter should be well considered; for neither our own islands nor Smyrna, can furnish a substitute to answer the same purposes as the cotton of the growths of Brazil and Demerary in America; Bengal, Surat, and the Isle of France, in the East-Indies; all which are become indispensibly necessary to our manufactories; and without which they cannot be carried on, either to their present extent, or with half the national advantages which result from them.

It is hoped therefore, when the subject is better understood, that every idea of an application, tending to limit the channels by which cotton wool may be obtained from all parts of the world, will be dropt; or if it is not, that the wisdom of government will see the national injury with which such a measure is pregnant; and that, on this just and obvious ground, it will be resisted as dangerous and impolitic.

I. Because the East-India Company, notwithstanding what was expected from that respectable body, have not hitherto imported one ounce of the fine cotton wool fit for our manufactories, and there can be no security that they will do it, although it is clear, that the superior qualities would yield a profit exceedingly beyond any article of commerce in which that Company is engaged.

II. Because the Turkey Company imports only a very coarse staple, by no means fit for these branches of the manufactures from which the greatest national benefit is derived.

III. Because the West-India importations, although superior in general to the Smyrna cotton, is still by no means applicable to the finer manufactures lately introduced, and now prosecuting with so much success.

IV. Because the whole cotton imported from Smyrna, and raised in our West India islands, when put together, is not equal to two thirds of the consumption when the trade was at its full extent:—and is not at all applicable to many branches of the manufacture.—Under such circumstances, would it not be exceedingly unwise and impolitic to establish any system whatever, by which the price of a raw material, so necessary to a growing manufacture, should be enhanced by a limited importation —by a duty imposed—or by a reduction of the quantity necessary for the consumption.

The exhibition of British muslins which has been made at the General Hall in Bishopsgate Street, proves incontestably what this country can do, if properly encouraged.

From the sudden and unparalleled rise of this manufacture: from the perfection to which it has been brought in so very short a period, what
may

may we not expect from this branch of trade? Having rivaled every other country in the world already in a vast variety of fabrics, is it not reasonable to hope, that with proper encouragement, this country may be able, to supply all Europe, and even part of Asia and Africa, in a very few years with fine cotton goods?—No man will for a moment examine the progress that has been made in the British calicoes and muslins, and afterwards entertain a doubt upon the most rational grounds, that this will not be the case if the manufacturers meet with common encouragement, and are permitted to find the raw material where it is to be obtained best and cheapest.—This is the ground work upon which inland industry flourishes in every country in the world:—but, of all others, the cotton manufacture seems to claim the pre-eminence over most other branches, from the extent of the national benefit attached to it.—For in the finer fabrics, and particularly the muslins, the value of the finished goods arises almost from labour alone, for the raw material bears no sort of proportion, when it is considered, that a single pound of fine cotton, worth five shillings, may be raised in value, so as to draw from foreign countries, or retain at home what otherwise would have gone abroad, a sum equal to from five to twenty guineas, and in some instances more money; and this principally from the labour of women and children, who formerly produced little to the state, and were in many instances a burden. Let us suppose, for example, that in consequence of the fostering hand of government, and by means of a general public exhibition, whereby the foreigners of all nations are invited to examine the quality and fabrics of our cotton manufactories, and by assimilating the sales periodically to their habits, the demand should gradually increase for the consumption of France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Russia, and the Northern countries of Europe, and also Turkey, Egypt, and Africa, so as to reach *six millions sterling* above the present amount.—The probability is, that the whole of the raw materials would not exceed a million, in producing these goods, and the nation would gain a clear additional profit of five millions sterling, arising principally out of the industry of women and children, aided by ingenious machinery, and thereby creating a new and unexpected resource which did not exist before, and which was not in the contemplation of any person ten years ago, as a thing possible to exist.

To those therefore who are accustomed to consider subjects of this kind, who are anxious for their country's prosperity, and for these new resources which arise out of the improved industry of the people, it must be a very pleasing reflection to see new sources of wealth spring up every day, and all ranks of men interested in the public prosperity, and who have it in their power to be instrumental in assisting the national industry, cannot fail to be stimulated with a desire to give a preference to the home manufacturers, as the best and surest means of increasing the solid wealth and prosperity of the country, and in giving vigour and energy to the exertions of the state.

LONDON, 8th December, 1789.



RELATIVE TO THE
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